

## Aberystwyth University

### *Recapturing Mighty Joe Young*

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*Publication date:*  
2017

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Heuser, H. (Author). (2017). Recapturing Mighty Joe Young: The Movie! The Memory!! The Make-believe!!!  
Exhibition <https://harryheuser.com/recapturing-mighty-joe-young-the-movie-the-memory-the-make-believe/>

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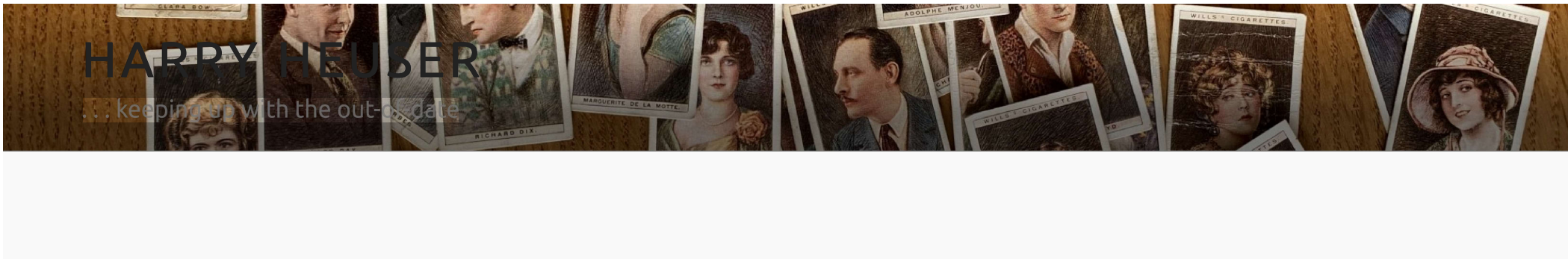
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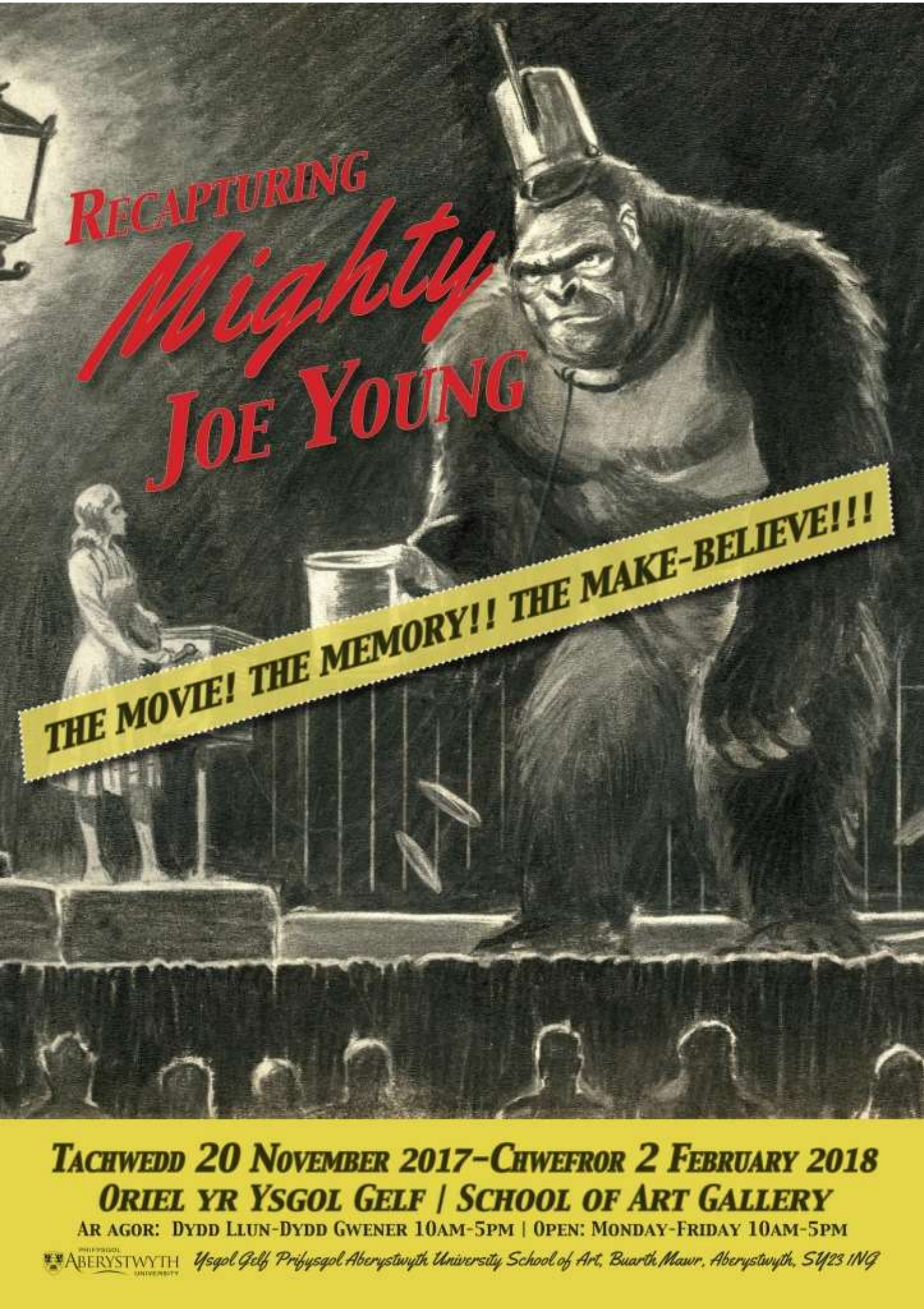
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RECAPTURING MIGHTY JOE YOUNG: INTRODUCTION

*Recapturing Mighty Joe Young: The Movie! The Memory!! The Make-believe!!!*



Mighty Joe Young exhibition poster (School of Art, Aberystwyth University, 2017-18)  
Poster design by Neil Holland



## Curator’s Foreword

From adaptations of Edgar Allan Poe’s “Murders in the Rue Morgue” (1841) to the latest installment in the *Planet of the Apes* saga, non-human primates have played a prominent part in the evolution of motion pictures. Ridiculous and sublime, they act as uncanny doubles of our uncouth selves.

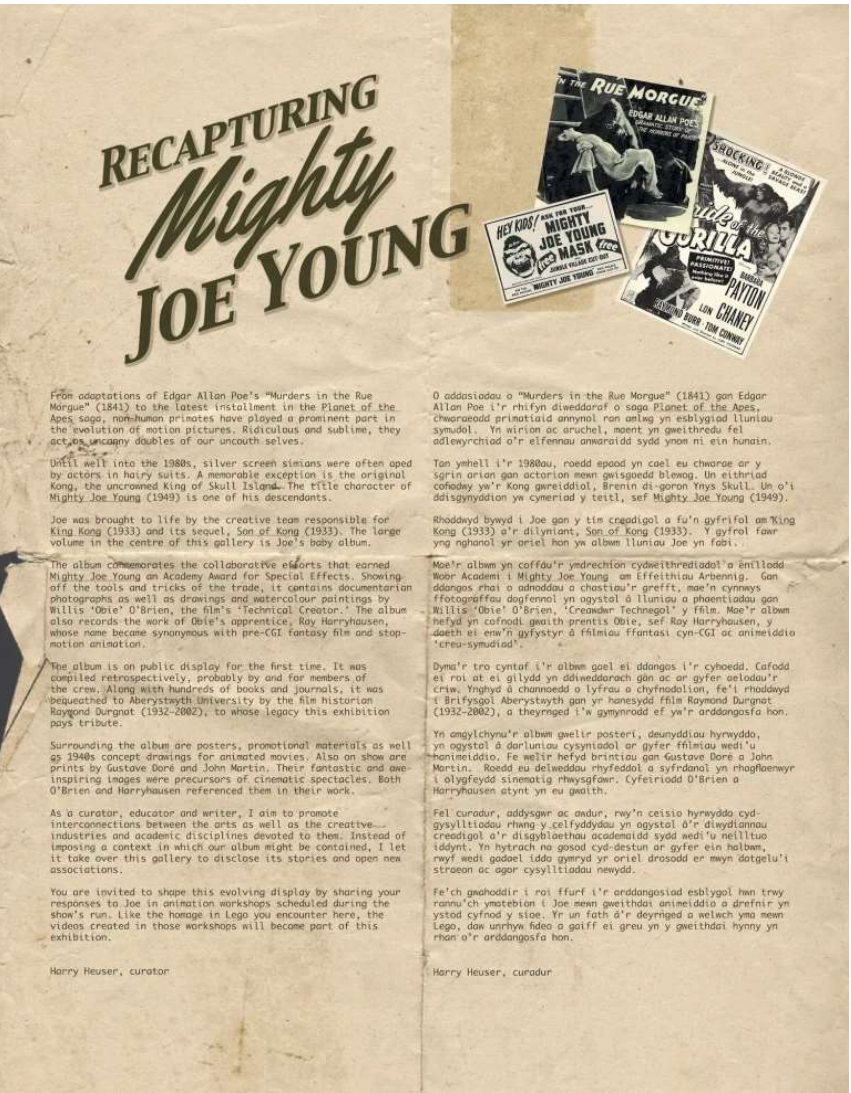
Until well into the 1980s, silver screen simians were often aped by actors in hairy suits. A memorable exception is the original Kong, the uncrowned King of Skull Island. The title character of *Mighty Joe Young* (1949) is one of his descendants.

Joe was brought to life by the creative team responsible for *King Kong* (1933) and its sequel, *Son of Kong* (1933). The large volume in the centre of this gallery is Joe’s baby album.



The *Mighty Joe Young* album as displayed in the exhibition alongside related artefacts.

The album commemorates the collaborative efforts that earned *Mighty Joe Young* an Academy Award for Special Effects. Showing off the tools and tricks of the trade, it contains documentarian photographs as well as drawings and watercolour paintings by Willis ‘Obie’ O’Brien, the film’s ‘Technical Creator.’ The album also records the work of Obie’s apprentice, Ray Harryhausen, whose name became synonymous with pre-CGI fantasy film and stop-motion animation.



*Introductory text panel, Recapturing Mighty Joe Young exhibition*

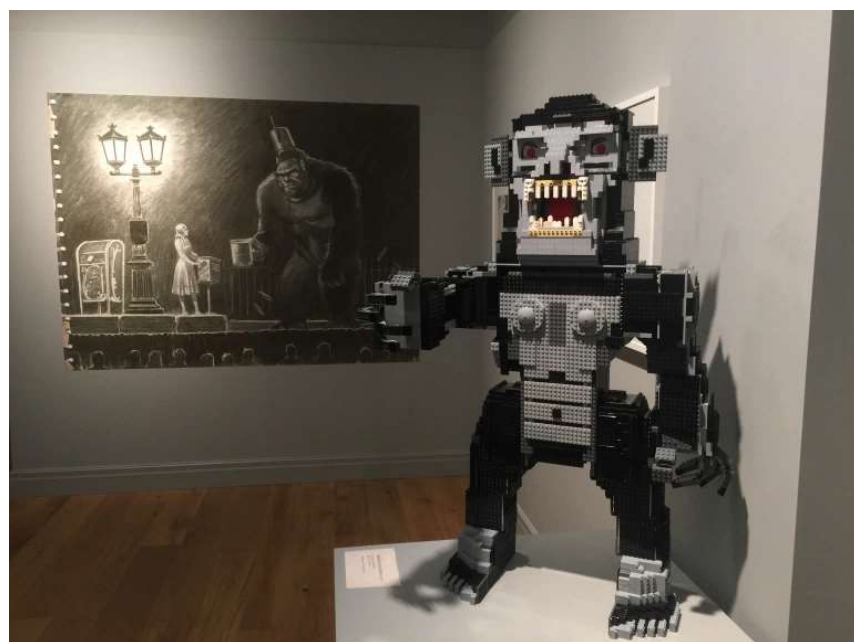
*(School of Art, Aberystwyth University, 2017-18); panel design by Neil Holland*

The album was on public display as part of this exhibition for the first time. It was compiled retrospectively, probably by and for members of the crew. Along with hundreds of books and journals, it was bequeathed to Aberystwyth University by the film historian Raymond Durgnat (1932–2002), to whose legacy this exhibition pays tribute.



*Developing an exhibition based on a single artefact — an album of photographs and original drawings — was somewhat of a challenge. I decided to use reproductions from the album for display on the walls, along with slide shows and interpretative texts, as well as related artefacts for contextualisation.*

Surrounding the album in the gallery are posters, promotional materials as well as 1940s concept drawings for animated movies. Also on show are prints by Gustave Doré and John Martin. Their fantastic and awe-inspiring images are precursors of cinematic spectacles. Both O’Brien and Harryhausen referenced them in their work.



*Bricktacular Beast (2017) by Richard Boalch*

*Lego sculpture created especially for the exhibition*

*Courtesy of the artist*

As a curator, educator and writer, I aim to promote interconnections between the arts as well as the creative industries and academic disciplines devoted to them. Instead of imposing a context in which our album might be contained, I let it take over this gallery to disclose its stories and open new associations.

Audiences were invited to shape the evolving display by sharing their responses to Joe in animation workshops scheduled during the show’s run. Like the homage in Lego they encounter in the gallery, the videos created in those workshops became part of this exhibition.

Harry Heuser, curator



## Navigating the Display

[Recapturing Mighty Joe Young: Introduction](#)

[The \*Mighty Joe Young\* Album at Aberystwyth University](#)

[Ray Harryhausen: Influence and Inspiration](#)

[Mighty Joe Young: Cast and Crew](#)

[Mighty Joe Young: Promotion and Propaganda](#)

[1940s Animation](#)

[Drawing and Animation Workshops](#)

[The Raymond Durnat Bequest](#)

## Press Release



*STOP ALL TRAFFIC!!! / CLEAR ALL ROADS!!! / SOUND ALL ALARMS!!! / MIGHTY JOE YOUNG ... IS ON THE LOOSE!!!\**

22 November 2017 Gala Opening of the exhibition *Recapturing 'Mighty Joe Young': The Movie! The Memory!! The Make-believe!!!*

- *Recapturing 'Mighty Joe Young'* marks the public unveiling of a unique album of production stills, concept art and rare behind-the-scenes photographs commemorating the making of the 1949 Hollywood fantasy movie *Mighty Joe Young*.
- *Mighty Joe Young* was the brainchild of the creative team responsible for *King Kong* (1933). The film earned an Academy Award for Special Effects.
- The album provides insights into pre-CGI visual effects, including the work of Ray Harryhausen (1920–2013), the legendary stop-motion animator whose career in feature films began with *Mighty Joe Young*.
- Join us for a series of events on 22 November as well as workshops scheduled during the run of the exhibition.

22 November 2017

5 pm Introduction to the exhibition by curator Dr Harry Heuser

5:15 pm Presentation on the work of visual effects artist and *Mighty Joe Young* stop-motion animator Ray Harryhausen by Connor Heaney, Collections Manager of the Ray and Diana Harryhausen Foundation

6:30 – 8 pm Free screening of the 1949 movie *Mighty Joe Young* at the School of Art

Upcoming events

- *Re-animating Mighty Joe Young*: Free stop-motion animation workshops by Holden Holcombe
- *Imaginary Worlds*: Free illustration workshops by Chris Iliff, School of Art

See [www.aber.ac.uk/en/art/news-events](http://www.aber.ac.uk/en/art/news-events) for booking information.

More about the show

- The work of Ray Harryhausen has long attracted enthusiasts of fantasy and science fiction. Now, leading up to the 2020 centenary of Harryhausen's birth, major institutions – including Tate Britain in London – are staging exhibitions of his drawings and sculptures.
- Along with hundreds of books and journals, the commemorative *Mighty Joe Young* album was bequeathed to Aberystwyth University by the noted film historian Raymond Durnat (1932–2002), to whose memory this exhibition pays tribute as well.
- The *Mighty Joe Young* album is displayed among posters, promotional materials and 1940s concept drawings for animated films from Disney and Fleischer Studios, along with contemporary responses to *Mighty Joe Young*.
- Also on show are prints by Gustave Doré and John Martin whose fantastic and sublime images served as an inspiration to Ray Harryhausen.
- Curator Harry Heuser aims to uncover objects of visual culture that encourage interdisciplinary engagement with the arts and the academic disciplines devoted to them.

NEVER NEVER NEVER SUCH A SHOW!!! \*

\*Lines from the original trailer for the 1949 film *Mighty Joe Young*